

# Case Study: The City of Virginia Beach's Innovative Tool for Workforce Planning

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*No longer just a seaside resort, Virginia Beach has grown into a thriving, vibrant community supported not just by the local military and government but also by industry and retail development. Truly a "Community for a Lifetime," Virginia Beach was rated by USA Weekend Magazine in 2003 as the best place to live in America. The city offers its citizens opportunities in education, entertainment, shopping and outdoor recreation. The municipal government has about 6,000 employees who provide support to nearly half a million residents. The Human Resources Department, with about 45 employees, includes the divisions of Staffing and Compensation, Employee Relations, Occupational Health, Safety, Training, and Administration. Human Resources is currently pioneering a workforce development initiative to help the city counter challenging demographic and technological changes that face the country's government and private sector employees alike.*

The City of Virginia Beach's Human Resources and Communications and Information Technology Departments collaborated to develop Workforce Planning and Development (WorkPAD) software. WorkPAD, winner of the 2003 E-Town State and Local Government Award for government agency best practices in E-Town, enables planners to pull data from the Human Resources Information System (HRIS) database, the Virginia Retirement System, and numerous other resources to enhance workforce planning efforts. Managers can query this system to produce reports detailing projected retirement statistics, workforce demographics, vacancy reports, and much more. This innovative software also features an online KSA and Competency Assessment piece that enables employees and supervisors to tailor career development paths. To introduce this innovative tool to the city's leadership, Human Resources realized that an effective communications strategy could make or break their Workforce Planning and Development initiative.

**R**apidly evolving technology, dramatically shifting workforce demographics, ever-increasing globalization, and a maturing workforce have combined to challenge human resource professionals of the 21st century. Government agencies large and small have begun to analyze their workforces carefully to consider how best to prepare their workers to meet tomorrow's challenges.<sup>1</sup> In the City of Virginia Beach, the Department of Human Resources has identified that 1,035 city

employees, 19 percent of the total workforce, will become eligible for retirement by 2008. Recognizing this potential drain of talent, knowledge and experience, city leaders chartered the Workforce Planning and Development (WFPD) Steering Committee to determine the best approach for the city's strategic human resources planning. This cross-functional committee began its work by conducting environmental scanning to discover how other government organizations were responding to these demanding workforce dynamics. They studied numerous models before designing the City of Virginia Beach's own method for strategic human resources planning.

Early in their discussions, the WFPD Steering Committee recognized that to produce accurate employee data, workforce planners would need data from several sources, including the city's payroll system and the Virginia Retirement System. Planners would need to produce reports that would accurately reflect employment, compensation and retirement data. If the city had software that pulled information from these existing systems, it would help planners to efficiently and accurately analyze workforce data. The right technology would facilitate collaboration and planning between city departments and the Department of Human Resources. It would provide all departments with a standard set of data to enhance the process of workforce planning. Producing this technological solution would require an in-depth understanding of both informational and operational processes in order to meet the workforce planners' needs.<sup>2</sup>

Once again, the WFPD Committee turned its attention outward to focus on what types of software other government organizations were using to assist them with workforce planning. Their external scanning confirmed what the Department of Communications and Information Technology (ComIT) had already seen as a trend. Across the country, local governments have established intranets as the preferred medium for employees to exchange data and share knowledge in order to more effectively collaborate on projects. These government intranets are abundant in resources, effortlessly capturing knowledge and data for easy retrieval by employees. Ideally, workforce planners should have access to such an intranet portal that would feed them data on employee demographics, compensation, retirement and employment trends.<sup>3</sup>

Driven by this need for a technological solution to enable workforce planning, representatives from two departments within the City of Virginia Beach, Human Resources (HR) and ComIT, met with members of the WFPD Steering Committee in order to discuss software requirements. The WFPD Committee developed a detailed wish list of the capabilities they wanted in this new software tool. For example, they envisioned WFPD teams using this tool to access all job descriptions within the city's pay plans. They also wanted the ability to pull live employee information from the city's Human Resources Information System (HRIS) and the Virginia Retirement System. The team envisioned workforce planners using the new software to produce reports and spreadsheets. With the ability to enter queries into the system, planners could tailor ad hoc reports based on queries of live data from the HRIS database to produce reports that would be integral to the development of their workforce plan. Managers and supervisors could conduct online assessments of employee competencies and knowledge, skills and abilities. Employees could complete self-assessments



and view job descriptions, associated competencies, and other information that could assist them in developing their personal career paths. WFPD teams could produce reports of retirement projections, demographic data and vacancy reports. Managers could access the city's strategic planning documents, the pay plans, and various planning tools, such as the new WFPD Guide, the KSA/Competency Guide, and numerous other resources that would help departments in their planning efforts.

The wish list of software requirements produced by the WFPD Steering Committee quickly became a mile long. As ComIT and HR reviewed this wish list, they became convinced that an off-the-shelf solution would not meet the city's workforce planning needs. So ComIT and HR joined forces to collaborate on development of an in-house software package, accessible through the city's intranet site, to support workforce planning. The WFPD Steering Committee christened the future software "WorkPAD," short for Workforce Planning and Development. Over the laborious course of two years, the vision took shape and WorkPAD was born.

## **Introducing and Promoting WorkPAD**

After two years of design and development, the time was right for HR to introduce WFPD to the city's leaders. The communication approach would be critical to the overall success of program implementation. It was important to demonstrate to the city's leaders that WFPD and WorkPAD would provide them with the tools and real-time information to make proactive, data-based decisions that would enhance their effectiveness and responsiveness.<sup>4</sup> Successful implementation of WFPD and WorkPAD would hinge on management's first impressions of the process and the software. Many middle managers seem to view any new program with suspicion, hesitant to buy in to what might simply be the "flavor of the month." They are busy people who manage even busier employees and they have no desire to overburden staff with work that is not in alignment with their current objectives. Fully anticipating resistance to change, HR developed a communication plan to address all organizational levels within the City of Virginia Beach.

Early in the plan, the "Beam," Virginia Beach's employee newsletter, published several articles about workforce planning and the work of the WFPD Committee in order to introduce employees to the concept of WFPD. Early versions of WFPD training were piloted to a sample group of managers and pilot projects were initiated in the Departments of Museums and Human Resources. The city WFPD leaders solicited feedback on these early WFPD efforts and HR and ComIT made additional modifications to WorkPAD and WFPD training. HR Training and Development developed a long-range training plan to help roll out WFPD. The plan included an overview course, software training, follow-up discussion groups, and just-in-time training on conducting employee assessments and producing WorkPAD reports.

At about this time, WorkPAD gained recognition from the Federal Executive Leadership Council and was awarded the 2003 E-Town State and Local Government Award for government agency best practices in E-Town. This award lauded WorkPAD as a vehicle that would enhance government service and help meet government chal-



lenges such as workforce planning and e-government convenience and accessibility. With no intention of allowing WorkPAD to rest on its laurels, HR staff stretched the software to its limits, testing every function the system offered. They gave it a strenuous workout, conducting competency and KSA assessments, pulling data and producing reports in order to test every system capability prior to citywide implementation. As a result, they identified numerous opportunities for improvement and ComIT responded with solutions that beefed up the system's overall capability, making it more resilient, capable and reliable.

At the same time the city's director of human resources began to educate the city's leadership on workforce planning. His first presentation was to the city's Management Leadership Team, composed of senior executives. He then presented an overview of WFPD to department directors. In January 2004, he communicated the City of Virginia Beach's WFPD vision to the City Council, pointing out the need to adopt a systemic method of workforce planning in order to respond to the challenges posed by dynamic workforce changes over the next 10 years. He mentioned the ongoing pilots in the museums and HR departments and in June he returned to the council to update them on completion of both pilots and the accompanying lessons that were learned.

It was time to begin roll out of WFPD and WorkPAD to the city at large. But first, HR needed to gain the support of the city's middle management. Acceptance by this group was critical to the program's future success. The human resources director and the WFPD coordinator collaborated to develop a dynamic presentation that would grab the attention of these managers. Their goal was to communicate the urgent need for workforce planning and to demonstrate WorkPAD as an exceptionally useful tool to which they would clamor for access. In July 2004, the director presented an overview of the WFPD process and an introduction to WorkPAD to about 150 of the City of Virginia Beach's managers. To conclude the discussion, he and his staff arranged for a "live" demonstration of WorkPAD. To grab the group's attention, the director engaged the audience by challenging participants to guess answers to compelling questions regarding their workforce. He posed the question: "Who can guess the number of people in the Department of Human Services that will be eligible for retirement in the next five years?" Another question: "How many workers in the Waste Management and Waste Disposal Departments could retire in the next five years?" Another: "What is the average retirement age in the Department of Libraries?" And: "What department has the highest percentage of women?" Each question focused on departments that were represented in the audience who enjoyed trying to guess the exact number. The participants who responded with the answer closest to the correct answer were rewarded for their participation with a t-shirt or other City of Virginia Beach souvenir.

The human resources director then gave the audience an opportunity to pose workforce-related questions about their departments and to observe how quickly WorkPAD could produce a response. A projector displayed the WorkPAD menu from a laptop that was logged into WorkPAD through the city's intranet connection. While watching, an HR analyst demonstrated how to query WorkPAD in order to: "List the employees, by job title, who will be eligible to retire in my department in the next five

years." Within seconds, through an ad hoc query, WorkPAD produced a report detailing the response. Audience members also observed as WorkPAD created a department vacancy report, a department demographic breakdown, and, just for fun, identified the longest-tenured employee within a department. They could see how the queries were created, and were surprised at how quickly the reports were produced. They also noted that the ad hoc queries generated reports in a Microsoft Excel format that could be easily sorted and viewed. (See **Table 1.**) Participants were rewarded with City of Virginia Beach memorabilia and all attendees received a token ballpoint pen inscribed with "City of Virginia Beach, Workforce Planning and Development."

**Table 1. Sample WorkPAD Table Listing Months of Service of Part-Time Workers in a Department**

Department Name	Bureau Name and Code	Member Name	Job Title	Months of Service
LIBRARY	BAYSIDE AREA LIBRARY	Smith, Sandy	LIBRARY INFORMATION SPECIALIST II	211
LIBRARY	AUTOMATED SERVICES	Jones, Johann	COMPUTER ELECTRONICS TECHNICIAN I	122
LIBRARY	BAYSIDE AREA LIBRARY	Reader, Ronda	CLERK I	24
LIBRARY	BAYSIDE AREA LIBRARY	Books, Manny	CLERK I	17
LIBRARY	BAYSIDE AREA LIBRARY	Student, Ima	CLERK I	10
LIBRARY	BAYSIDE AREA LIBRARY	Plant, Haws	CLERK I	9
LIBRARY	BAYSIDE AREA LIBRARY	Steel, Ira	CLERK I	6
LIBRARY	BAYSIDE AREA LIBRARY	Tester, Sal	LIBRARY INFORMATION SPECIALIST I	5
LIBRARY	BAYSIDE AREA LIBRARY	Sailor, John	LIBRARY INFORMATION SPECIALIST I	3
LIBRARY	BAYSIDE AREA LIBRARY	Citizen, Reder	LIBRARY INFORMATION SPECIALIST II	1



**Table 1** provides a sample report that lists employees in a particular unit by department, budget unit, employee name, job title, and months of service. The table can be sorted by any of the table headings.

## A Useful Tool


The response was overwhelming as managers quickly recognized the software's immediate functionality in the form of resources and reports. HR welcomed the response, seizing the opportunity to educate managers on workforce planning as well as on the new software. The WFPD coordinator was soon responding to numerous requests for immediate access to WorkPAD and had to schedule additional training to meet the demand. Some managers requested and received one-on-one sessions to learn about WorkPAD's capabilities. They got a hands-on look at the 16 resource documents that can be accessed through WorkPAD, including the city's pay plans and three-year-plan and five-year-forecast, a Guide to Environmental Scanning, WorkPAD Users' Guide, the KSA/Competency and WFPD guides, and a WFPD checklist. They learned that WorkPAD could help them to conduct employee KSA and competency assessments and to conduct gap analysis that would identify future human resources needs. The coordinator demonstrated how employees could access all job descriptions and their associated KSAs and competencies, as well as the training associated with the competencies. They learned how to quickly pull up individual or group employee data and, with a few keystrokes, to create reports detailing their work unit's demographics and retirement projections. They were pleased to see that WorkPAD allows them to design their own reports through an ad hoc report function.

WorkPAD far exceeds the original vision of the WFPD Committee, and ComIT continues to enhance its capability while they smooth over the initial software hiccups associated with any new technological solution. Today, ComIT and HR continue to solicit user feedback in order to further enhance the software. As ComIT continues to "tweak" WorkPAD's capabilities, the city's workforce planners find themselves impressed with its ability to produce useful reports that previously required extensive time and effort.

The most recent iteration of WorkPAD provides workforce planners with help in the initial stages of workforce planning by providing an Environmental Scanning Guide, a Workforce Planning Checklist, a Where to Start Guide, the WorkPAD User Guide and a WorkPAD template (see Table 2) that shows the options available in WorkPAD's menu. WorkPAD also provides easy access to the city's KSA and Competency Guide, Pay Plans and the Five-Year Budget Forecast. Using WorkPAD, planners can easily review job descriptions and recommend revisions, verify training records, and retrieve numerous documents that will help them along the way. Using the city's WFPD model, a department will first conduct environmental scanning to assess economic, governmental/legal, technological, social, geographical, and other trends in order to evaluate their impact on their department's mission and service delivery. Then, supervisors and staff will use WorkPAD to conduct employee competency assessments. Planners can use the software to retrieve information on projected

retirements and turnover history within their departments and to enter information on future employee competencies, based on environmental scanning. They can then produce numerous reports that highlight current and future gaps in key functional areas and develop a plan of action to address these gaps. This plan of action will become the blueprint for the department's workforce plan.

**Table 2. WorkPAD TEMPLATE**



HOME	WORK FORCE	JOBS	ASSESSMENTS	TRAINING	REPORTS	ADMIN
My Profile	Member Search	Search	Job KSA	Course Search	Select Report	Manage User Access
Planning	Position Search	New Job Classes	Competency		Ad Hoc Query	Departments
Resource Documents		Revised Descriptions	Competency Assessment Pipeline			Bureaus
Messages from HR	Position Projections	Pipeline			Organizational Tree	Resource Documents
Logoff		Master KSA's				Messages
		Clusters/Competencies				Lookups Educational Level Race EEO Category Pay Plans Terminations
						Uploads Retirement Data External Course

6/2/04 Workforce Planning and Development (Version 3.2 - PROD)  
City of Virginia Beach, VA

When implementing any new technology, managers must consider the human factor, and WorkPAD is no different. Employees will require training on this new software as well as on the city's approach to workforce planning. Some staff members will have resistance to the technology that will be difficult to understand. Non-acceptance may come not only from the non-computer literate, but also from unexpected corners. Technical staff may find themselves in new situations that will require them to understand employee needs and work across departmental boundaries in new ways.<sup>45</sup> Like most computer users today, City of Virginia Beach employees quickly lose



patience when software moves slowly and access is not as instantaneous as possible. People are hesitant to embrace new technology if it does not appear familiar or at least as user-friendly as their current systems. It is important that ComIT and HR respond quickly to user concerns in order to convince them to use the new software. Employees need to know that the software can produce what they need, when they need it.

As WorkPAD is rolled out to users throughout the city, human resources and ComIT staff will continue their partnership to ensure that the system can accommodate the city's 6,500 employees who will all require access. HR's intention is for all employees to have access to the software in order to conduct personal KSA assessments, identify developmental needs and consider career options. Employees will also use WorkPAD to review city job descriptions and their associated competencies and training. They can then consult with their supervisors and HR analysts regarding career and training options to meet long-range objectives. As other technological solutions relieve analysts from some of their more routine tasks, they can shift their attention to forming partnerships with management in support of workforce planning efforts and mentoring employees as they chart their career plans.

The City of Virginia Beach has placed high expectations on WorkPAD. The software has numerous features that will enhance the workforce planning process, but it will not complete a workforce plan without human intervention. It provides some excellent planning tools, but cannot substitute for the department manager's careful analysis and interpretation of data before designing a sound workforce plan. Workforce planning can take place without WorkPAD, but WorkPAD has the potential to facilitate and enhance the planning process by putting information at the users' fingertips. WorkPAD and workforce planning will continue to evolve over the next few years. As City of Virginia Beach employees become comfortable with the system and experienced in workforce planning, WorkPAD will become just another software system that managers and employees will log onto first thing in the morning to do the business of workforce planning.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> M.E. Green (2000) "Beware and prepare: The government workforce of the future," *Public Personnel Management* 29(4): 435.
- <sup>2</sup> M. Singer (2003) "Tech knowledge and governance: How can managers integrate technology issues?" *Public Management* 85(2): 6.
- <sup>3</sup> B. Waisanen (2002) "The Future of E-Government: Technology-Fueled Management Tools," *Public Management* 84(5):6.
- <sup>4</sup> B. Waisanen (2002).
- <sup>5</sup> M. Singer (2003).

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